ORGANIZATIONAL STORYTELLING:
THE POWER OF A FIRM'S GENESIS STORY AND ITS METAPHOR

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ABSTRACT

Storytelling in organizations serves many purposes from passing on operational norms to clarifying and focusing organizational memory. Perhaps, the most significant story is a business organization's genesis story and the primary organizational metaphor that evolves from that story which, together, frame an organization's ethics and morality. This article explores one firm's story and metaphor in detail, but has applications for understanding all business organizations and their ethics.

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Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim. Aristotle - *The Nicomachean Ethics 1094a (Book I, Ch. 1)*

THE CONTEXT

The present article stems from research done with the cooperation of a mid-sized transportation firm in the eastern part of the United States. Both executives and staff personnel were interviewed over a four month period. The firm was gracious enough to provide employee time and a space for conducting the interviews. Each interviewee was asked to volunteer for the one hour, recorded interview and informed beforehand that they would be asked to remember some stories about themselves and the company, i.e. practical jokes, how they got their jobs, how the firm got started, problems they faced in doing their jobs, and things they were proud of. Interviewees were both men and women, ranging in "years of service to the company" from two to more than 50 and held management, office staff and shop positions. Other stories quoted in this article originated from video taped interviews the company had done earlier with current and retired employees. At the request of the firm, all names have been altered to maintain interviewee and company anonymity.

This article will first define "business ethics" and morality, discuss the genesis story and the development of its metaphor and then examine both as they pertain to the target company mentioned above.

BUSINESS ETHICS AND MORALITY

Business ethics pertains to human interactions when sourcing, producing and marketing goods and services for profit, and includes the relationships between management and employees, the firm and its primary stakeholders, the business and its relationships to the community, government and society in general.

In the broadest sense, ethics, as used in this text, is a society's ongoing examination and pursuit of actions and practices that best promote the enrichment of peoples' lives- both materially and spiritually. It is a society's quest for defining and understanding what constitutes "the good life" or "the good [that] has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim" (Aristotle, 350BC), creating the conditions necessary for potentially all individuals to achieve it (Buchholz and Rosenthal, 1998). Ethics is a societal discussion of what *ought* to be considered for overall human well-being, including the broader concepts of fairness, justice and injustice, what rights and responsibilities are operable under certain situations, and what virtues a society admires and wants to emphasize. Ethics takes an over-view, investigating the state toward which the society should be progressing economically, politically, socially and morally.

As business is a social construct, it, too, must be engaged in a society's ethics debate. Economist Milton Freidman is not incorrect in suggesting that the responsibility of business is to produce goods and services people are willing to pay for and, in the process, create wealth for its owners.

However, as an integral, legally sanctioned constituent of society, business, like every other member of society, should be a participant in its ethics; that is, how business might or might not participate in establishing larger social objectives which promote a fulfilling life. For business not to participate in this discussion and eventual realization of a society's goals is to subject itself to increased regulation and legal constraint. Regulation is merely society's way of saying that it does not approve of the way business is operating or, that by operating the way it is, business is ignoring what the society has set as objectives and goals.

Unlike ethics investigating and conceptualizing where we are "aimed," morality reflects what we are currently practicing. In other words, morality more pertains to our everyday experience - our "local world" as Kleinman puts it. "Experience is moral. . . . . because it is the medium of engagement in everyday life in which things are at stake and in which ordinary people are deeply engaged as stake-holders who have important things to lose, to gain, and to preserve" (Kleinman, 2000). In business organizations, people are concerned with their status in the organization, what their work means, job security and the *angst* threats of job loss can generate, definitions of their worth, relations with subordinates and superiors, coping with aggression and/or humiliation, responding to pressures to perform, and the subjugation of one's non-working morality to the demands of the organization. Each of these has a moral component. Thus, business "ethics," then, should not be confused with business "morality." Morality is the sum total of a particular society's or organization's current perceived traditions, beliefs, values, attitudes and norms that have been cultivated over time, institutionalized in religious doctrine, laws, regulations, human resource documents and codes of conduct which explicitly or implicitly suggest how an individual should behave in situations as they are encountered daily. Ethics may well include a discussion of trends in morality; but, again, morality defines primarily where we are.

The use of formal, codes of conduct and carefully constructed principles of corporate "ethics" which explicitly define corporate morality in its policies regarding specific, concrete situations - payments to suppliers, contract bidding, conflict of interest, external relations, corporate governance, and so on - is widespread among large business organizations today. So, too are human resource management guidelines and regulations. The larger and more complex the business and the greater the number and types of internal and external stakeholders, the more complex and comprehensive is its code of conduct. In the very complex, highly regulated, litigious world in which we live, it is no wonder.

THE GENESIS STORY AND ITS METAPHOR

As mentioned above, codes of conduct are widely used to inform employees and other stakeholders about the firm's recognition of regulatory obligations, to communicate corporate policies that have evolved over time, and/or to iterate the formal relationships between the firm and its employees. Yet, codes of conduct are merely reflections of an organization's public morals rather then a statement of ethics. To begin to formulate a sense of firm's ethics and its morality it is necessary to look beyond carefully constructed, published codes and listen to the stories that employees and managers tell each other. Listening to a story like "Before you go any further with that idea, let me tell you about what happened to Ned a couple of years back" is no doubt the way most new employees learn their company's true morality.

Perhaps, one of the most developed and embedded stories heard in a business organization is it's genesis story, that is, how the firm came to be and why. Whether the organization is relatively obscure or internationally known, it has a genesis narrative; and, as the firm develops, so does the genesis story and its importance to the firm.

Like any other story, a genesis story evolves over time. The energies and feats of founders are exaggerated and less savory aspects of their personalities are downplayed, successful problem solving methodologies become inculcated into organizational memory, failed solutions are minimized or forgotten, and new cues and events are "recorded" and relived via each new telling. What remains, however, is the basic genesis story itself as both master narrative and organizational metaphor.

Genesis stories can be both positive and negative for an organization's development. On one hand, they can be useful in training new employees as they begin a process of socialization, coping with disruptive external and internal conflicts, creating a sense of collegiality, or perpetuating and reinforcing the values and norms of the organization. On the other hand, genesis stories that do not evolve over time can become formidable barriers to change and growth as firms become locked in their own stories and cannot envision themselves being anything else

or responding to the environment in any other way. Witness the litany of firms that have disappeared because of their inability to change their narrative in face of changing business and societal demands. In these cases, the genesis story became a cataclysmic anchor. This, of course, is material for another article.

Eventually a metaphor evolves which is a crystallization of the genesis story. This metaphor has special meaning to employees in that contains the genesis story itself. By mentioning the metaphor, employees can recall the original story in its entirety – at least as they know it. This is what Boje calls the "terse" story (Boje, 1991). "Remember what happened to Bob" is an example of a terse story. Organizationally, everyone remembers what happened to Bob.

Both the genesis story and its metaphor can become so ingrained in individuals that the narrative becomes the primary way employees organize their perceptions about the organizational component of their lives. Like Schein's organizational culture which over time becomes deeply embedded (Schein, 1984), the genesis narrative and metaphor are similar in that they become the frame within which individuals conceptualize their organization. In fact, the genesis narrative can be seen as the foundation of an organization's culture; and where the genesis narrative is particularly prevalent in organizational memory, the organization's culture is more deeply embedded and more easily characterized. People do not consciously conjure up a genesis story or its metaphor (although some public relations firms have tried), it is really there because it has been told and retold so many times. It is the way individuals relive episodes of the organization's memory. But more than that, the nature of the story and the significance of the metaphor can become so implicit that it dictates behavior – a kind of "this is what we are, so this is the way we should act" – or the moral basis for firm and employee actions. The narrative becomes a template for responses to both internal and external conflicts, a basis for day-to-day motivation, the organization's *raison d'etre*.

THE COMPANY

The subject firm was established by its founder and a partner seventy-five years ago and has been managed by three generations of the family, except for short periods of time. It describes itself in terms of its "*Immutable Values*:"

    1) Always service the customer first – the hierarchy of service, growth, cost and profit.

2) Business designed to make profit.
3) Always have a strategy
4) Strive to be better before bigger
5) Strong work environment exists
6) Ownership and Accountability is pushed down and clearly understood.
7) Always share the improvements.
           (quoted by permission)

However, as we shall see, the real basis of its core values comes from something else – its genesis story and metaphor.

The firm describes itself as a "family" business and, as we will see, this term is derived from the firm's genesis narrative and has become its defining metaphor. The concept of "family" is deeply embedded in the firm's ethics and morality. In reality, there are two meanings to the term "family" and are used interchangeably by the owners and employees alike. The first is the proprietary "family" of three generations of private ownership, continuous family involvement, and nearly constant family management – there are five family members currently involved in management. All members of the Board of Directors are family. At the same time, the term "family" has been broadened over time to include <u>all</u> employees of the firm: "Well, this company is, as you know, family and they are very focused on the family;" ". . . as they added employees, they were part of the family." And further:

> I think the biggest thread going right through it is it has always been a family oriented company. The _____ make their employees feel, actually feel like part of the family. All of them have always had an open door policy. If anyone had any problems, they could go right to the president [owners]. You didn't have to go through layers of command, et cetera. And you didn't always get what you asked for, of course, but nobody ever does. That, I think would be the constant thread through it. [Jim]

> Our success has been our roots. What we stand for and that we are family. That's our success and as we, if we do branch out sometimes you probably have a non-family member in there running that thing and there is always the risk that they are not going to do it our way. [Allen – ex-CEO]

And they are willing to work with you. For instance, there is a situation at home which I had asked to rearrange my work hours so I could be at home a bit more. You know, take my child to school, work a little bit later, so I can get my time in. They are willing to do that. You know, there again, they are willing to put family first, and I think that comes back to ultimately their family, and I think that is some of why I have stayed. I am going to start to cry the more I think about it. But, uhm, they are just willing to work with the people, you know. Their family is important and they tell you that, and they tell you family is important. And they relay that my allowing you to rework your schedule, by allowing you to take of this day or that day or to do whatever you need to do for your home. I think they try to let you know, "We are open." "We are open. You are allowed to just come to us, let us know. Just come to us," you know. Don't just. . . . but I came in and talk to them about reworking my hours and they said, "Yeh, that would be fine." [Ann]

The ethics of the company, as defined above, has been framed by the concept of inclusive of family relations. Given that the firm is located in a smaller town where values are somewhat conservative, the management and employees of this firm would consider being one of a larger, protective kinship group as part of their definition of "the good life," that is, inclusiveness, a deep sense of belonging, recognition, clear lines of authority, less formal but well understood relationships, protection from external threats, security, and the longevity of association. All of the interviewees feel very connected to the firm "as family." They do not see their employment as something separate from there non-working world, but rather as merely a part of the fabric of their lives. None envision the company's success apart from their own; nor does management see the firm's success without continued employee accomplishments. It would appear that the goals and objectives of individual employees are closely aligned with those of management and the company itself. In fact, when asked what the company has done for them, the answers ranged from "the roof over my head is paid for by _____," to "support my son as a single mother," to "paid for the education of my children," to "You have taken care of my family, you have educated my children, I have worn decent clothes."

I went to work there with a handicap and I worked there all my life. I done the job that I was supposed to do and I was glad someone give the opportunity to do it. I appreciate Bob's [the founder] doin' that for me. Otherwise I don't know what I'd a done. [Bill]

I think it is because we paid a decent wage, a living wage and taking care of people with good benefits. Have made people feel like they are part of the organization. Most of them have no real desire to leave. . . . . There are some exceptions, of course, but if, I think, you talk to almost anyone out there they're not thinking about "Gee I am only going to be here another year and then I'm going to go look somewhere else." I think they are here because they want to be here. [Jim]

Acceptance into the firm seems to have meant something very personal to these employees. Many agreed that the beliefs and values of the firm's management reflected their own and was a major reason why they have stayed with the company as long has they have. One of the most noticeable things about this firm is the lack of turnover, particularly of salaried employees. Most of the employees interviewed had been with the company for 15 years or more. Many will have worked their entire lives for the company when they retire.

There is a question here about whether the area's indigenous culture created such a strong "family" work group identity or if the company actually created it. Most suggested that they joined the firm because it was like joining family or they felt as though they were accepted as part of a small intimate group. Several mentioned that while looking for a job, others had mentioned the positive atmosphere at the firm. However, most said that they would not have stayed had the atmosphere been otherwise. In all cases, the overall culture of the firm was very important to them.

The family concept is also true of smaller, more intimate work groups within the firm. Functional departments are relatively small, and individuals who work in these departments have spent eight or more years together. These units represent the core family groupings in the firm, referring to these relationships as being on the level of brother and sister. In other words, they treated each other with a certain respect and affection, but

were not highly involved with each other outside the work place. The felt they could implicitly depend on each other should they need support of any kind, but did not feel obligated to socialize on a constant basis as friends. An interesting observation by one of the salaried employees was that the non-salaried employees actually spent more time with each other outside work due to common interests (hunting, fishing, etc.) or just socializing. The salaried employees, however, who are more committed to the firm and have a greater sense of inclusion in the company, felt very strongly about each other and seemed sure of mutual support both in and out of the work place.

To most employees, the firm itself has become an extended family of grandparents (the founder, older employees and retirees), cousins (in the same firm, but not the same office), and uncles and aunts (older employees not in the same department or functional area.). In reality, the "family" metaphor goes beyond simply how management morally treats employees and how employees should treat each other. There were many cases of the company hiring fathers and their children to extend and deepen the sense of family. This was done for three primary reasons: controlling inter-employee relations was simpler; employee loyalty was stronger if one hired relatives; and attempts at unionization were quickly disposed of. Kathy, a thirty-nine year employee, remembers:

K: But you know one story, the funniest story. My Dad, he started as a driver, and when he lost his license, because he didn't stop at a railway track, he moved into the shop. The have always been good.. He didn't have his license, he obviously couldn't work, but they allowed him, because he was a mechanic, to work in the shop so that we wouldn't be without an income and then my mother liked it that way so he stayed and retired a shop foreman.
M: So he worked with Mr. _____ then?
K: Yes. He was _____'s boss.
M: Okay.
K: Uh, we were at that time in our prior building. We were actually in two different locations. They had built an new dock operation center and the mechanics and the office were still in old building and you crossed the dock to get from the office over to the shop. One of the girls, it was right after I started, told me that if I ever had

reason to go over there, I should never, ever go without someone with me because of going into where these men were. Well, in the first place, my Dad would have killed anyone who did something improper and, in the second place, they were some of the nicest guys that you would ever want to meet. Now they are all retired, mostly dead now, but they were from the old school, they were gentlemen. And I can't imagine any of them even saying something off color. But it
was just a perception of these are guys and they are a bunch of . . . . . . guys. [Kathy]

This story presents two aspects of the metaphor: (1) people like her father were taken care of by the family despite infractions, and (2) there is always family around who can take care of you. Kathy knew full well that no one dared accost her because of her father's presence in the firm.

It used to be that we had so many relatives, you really had to watch what you said about anybody [laughter], because you'd find out he had a cousin working here. I'm serious. One time we had like twelve _____'s - and _____'s [Allen] - and a ton of _____'s. [Jim]

Yet, one of the more pointed reasons for hiring relatives was to keep unions from organizing the dock hands and drivers. Unionization has always been a threat in the mind of smaller trucking firm management. Even this firm had had its unionized service centers, which, incidentally, were eventually closed. The feeling of the firm was that families did not need outside interference in the way things were done and most employees reiterated this sentiment. The family took care of its own in terms of hours, wages and benefits. Besides, perhaps, it would be best if one let clan members monitor and control related employees.

Many companies are opposed to hiring relatives. And we are just the opposite. Given two candidates, one's a relative and one not, we'll hire the relative. And my theory years ago was, again getting back to the labor problem [unionization], if I was having trouble with your son, who was working for us, I'd come to you and I'd say, "Hey, you know your son, John, he doesn't know what we stand for. Now how about sittin' John down at the table and get him

straightened around." And it worked very well. [Allen]

An older employee would come to me over the years, and probably to Jim, too, and say, "Hey, my son is just got out of trade school or high school or whatever. He's looking for a job and I'd like him to work here." So, we would go through our process and ultimately hire that guy so the father had an obligation to the company, too, because based on his relationship we hired his son, or his nephew, or whatever. That, that really worked when we had these union attempts. Invariably, it would be the younger "Smith" guy and I'd go to the father Smith and I'd say, "Hey, what's goin' on here?" And it would help. [Allen]

This pattern of hiring relatives was not practiced solely at the home office. Outlying service centers also employed fathers and sons, uncles and nephews. Although not as common as it was during the early stages of the firm, it is still more common than one would normally find in a company today. One non-headquarter employee admitted: "Thirty years ago, I was one of the few who *didn't* have relations here."[Carl]

This does not mean that people were not let go for a variety of reasons, but in general the primary reasons were because they either did not do their specific jobs well or did not adjust to the "family member" profile from the beginning. Being related to another employee did not prevent dismissal, if the job performance was particularly poor.

The company genesis story begins as "a two man, one truck" operation, with the founder being one of the two. It is interesting that the original partner is mentioned in the genesis story, but is quickly excluded as the story progresses. It is said that this individual "sold out to the family," though he was never really a part owner of the firm, but stayed with the firm for many years, managing a major facility elsewhere in the state. Current employees of that facility still refer to him with respect. In the beginning, the operation was a simple one, originating eggs in the interior, transporting them to a large metropolitan area, and merchandising the truckload before returning home – hopefully with a backhaul.. Like any entrepreneurial activity in the 1930's in the United States, the beginnings were tenuous at best. At one point, the two took stock of where they were and realized that after expenses

"they had netted less than $7.50 dollars" [Jim] for their labor, but decided to keep going.

The founder's home, more specifically the family kitchen, was the first office, including truck dispatching activities and sales. It was not uncommon for long haul drivers to sleep at the founder's home and be fed by his wife, given a lack of cash flow at the time. The founder's wife was considered by many as a mother figure and full "partner" in the firm's operation. Eventually the founder's sister became its bookkeeper. The concept of family is at the center of this genesis story.

The founder, himself, was a driver, mechanic, manager and merchandiser. He considered himself merely another employee and asked to be called by his first name by all other employees.

….so I asked him where Mr. Smith's office was located and he said that Mr. Smith doesn't have an office, but he is out back there doing some work on a trailer. So I walked around the back and there he is with his work clothes on. He had his tools there and the wheels off and was relining brakes. So I walked over and I said, "You Mr. Smith," and he said, "My name's Bob Smith." I like to have my employees call me "Bob." I'm just an employee. [Ben]

Several interviewees told this anecdote and, in fact, first names are used exclusively and universally in the firm today.

Despite the humility shown in the quote above, the founder was a hard working, no non-sense kind of man and can best be described as the type of father figure one would envision during the early part of the last century. He was stern, absolute in his decision-making, not without a sense of humor at appropriate times, parsimonious, but fair and quite benevolent:

The first time I met Bob it was down building were the _____is right now, and as you went in the side door right around the corner, there was a large scale you weighed freight with. At that time, why, _____ was the foreman and he said, and he said OK let's go eat. And I walked over to the scales, and I am trying to get myself weighed to see how much I weighed, and the scales kept going up and

down and up and down and I couldn't figure that out and turned around and here's Bob has his foot on the scale and he'd take it off and put it on. And I just sort of looked at him and he said, "I am paying you to work," he said, "not to play." And I said I was on my dinner hour and he said, "Well thank goodness for that." [Ken]

My fondest memories are of Bob himself. Bob himself hired me as an employee and him and I over the years had a good relationship together and I was always fond of the man. I knew the _____ family from the time they were young kids until they all grow'd up and it was a great family relationship and _____ company's been very, very good to me over the thirty years that I spent there. [Carl]

The sense of family benevolence and kindness is not merely the result of good corporate internal image building, but a commitment to sharing. Indeed, the firm practiced profit sharing many years before other firms in the same industry. Employees interpret management consideration as something done by kin for kin.

When I was a kid, when my Dad was just a mechanic, one of the mechanics he worked with, they were friends, had a daughter who was crippled and had to go out of town for treatments, Bob had, it was probably a Cadillac, I think, I am not sure, it was a big car because it would take the wheelchair and all, he would give them that car to take this girl and, I understand, helped financially. But you didn't hear that because the girl's dad worked with my dad and told him. And they have always done that type thing and you don't know unless you know that person yourself, because it was no big deal. They just do it and this is part of the way they are. [Kathy]

_____, a driver in _____. This gentleman was one of the top drivers was involved in a serious car accident, ur, truck accident …while on the job. This company has done so much for his family and supporting them and just continuing to give updates and having all the employees, you know, send cards or whatever and just keep an up to date on his progress and that . . . .that's important. [Sally]

We could talk for, I don't know for how long, for a long, long time but I think the original thing is hiring good employees. And I like to think, this is a strictly personal opinion, after they are here, I think we try to make them better. Make 'em more caring, make 'em better. A prime example, we had a driver out in _____, Ohio in May was through not fault of his own was in a head on collision and he is very lucky to be alive, he had broken legs, broken arms, broken ribs, concussions and he was just, he was in intensive care for two and a half months. People here don't know _____ from John Smith out in California, somewhere. But we kept them informed about his progress and, if we didn't tell them, they'd ask, "How's _____?" Well all of the girls out here without any urging from anybody else decided they would take up a collection for him for Christmas. And they sent him cash for, I don't know what the final total was, five or six hundred dollars. Just the office girls out here. They wouldn't know _____ if he walked in the door. But they feel so good about a fellow employee that was having real trouble that they wanted to help. [Jim]

This story about the injured diver was told in nearly all interviews both at the home and outlying offices when asked about things that exemplified the company's concern for its family of employees. There were yet other stories about management's helping ill and financially strapped employees. "One thing you can about this company is that it truly cares."[Pete]

Like any other clan, there is "dirty laundry" or the occasional "ugly story" that will be kept inside the group and "pushed under the rug." But even when particularly unpleasant, things seem to be best handled "in-house" quietly and without public airing. A case of egregious sexual harassment that occurred over a decade ago was one such story. The individual involved, a middle level staff manager was neither fired nor severely sanctioned as he would have been today. At that time, sexual harassment in a male dominated culture was not pursued and was usually treated as a case of "he said, she said." Though investigated by management, it was resolved by letting it fade away.

The controller at that time, I was in his office for something one day, and he said had I heard what was going on and, of course, I had and he said well what did I think and I said well I know it was true because of things I had seen and personal experience and look at me and he said, "Well, you know, I have known him for a long time and I don't believe it." And that is pretty much what happened. And you know, every girl told the same story. It just pretty much died. It just died. [Kathy]

In reality, there were other problems that occurred in the company. There was some consternation over the sudden replacement of a family member as President. As troubling as it seemed at the time, it also met with a "it just died" resolution.

At one point, the family decided to bring in an "outside" manager to run the firm at the urging of a consultant. The new president was not a _____ nor did his style of management reflect what the family had been in the past. This was a traumatic time for the firm, both in terms of the business itself and the internal relations of the firm.

In order to maintain cash flow during this period of industry downturn and deregulation, the outside manager called for layoffs that were particularly painful to everyone involved. This was simply not the way family treats family. At the same time, a decision was made to reduce the work week to thirty five hours, the implication being that if this was not done more layoffs were eminent. Interestingly enough, in several interviews, the idea of reducing hours to avoid layoffs was attributed solely to the family owners and not this particular manager. In other words, employees felt that families protect there own by asking everyone to participate in the sacrifice rather than hurting kin. In reality, this decision came from the office of the outside CEO. After a couple of years, he was replaced by a series of outside CEO's at this time in the firm's history, but while some were respected for their knowledge of the industry, they were still not family. Most recall this period a "time of troubles."

On the other hand, the company seems to be very flexible in meeting external challenges and does so with the willing participation of employees. It has expanded geographically (particularly after deregulation) and adjusted to the demands of the industry, embracing new technologies that maximize communication and logistics. In fact, when asked what story they would tell about the firm's future,

respondents suggested that the company would be a successful, technology based transportation firm, changing to use any and all new technologies. All interviewees seem to recognize the value of training to stay abreast of technological advancements in their own area of expertise. Learning and personal growth is part of the founder's as well as company's ethics.

There is a common theme running through interviewees comments regarding nostalgia for the past. For example, many mentioned the "swimming pool" parties at the owner's home when the (obviously smaller office) was closed at mid-day on Friday and office employees would "party until all hours" or the Christmas parties which have withered away over the years. Whether or not the demise of these events is due to changes in liability laws or merely the result of growth, it is not known. Employees look back at these company "get - togethers" with both regret and with the realization that times have changed. The company continues to celebrate the achievements of specific employees via public recognition ceremonies, at company picnics as well as reports in the firm's internal newsletter.

The future of this firm's genesis story is not clear, though there is a serious attempt to perpetuate the story in a series of video productions, a "then and now" calendar campaign, brochures, and a bi-monthly newsletter is sent to all employees' homes. The newsletter is an extensive review of professional achievements and personal changes in employees' lives. Despite its being mentioned that the newsletter was important in allowing employees to match a voice on the phone to a face, there is not a sense of "family" conveyed in its reporting. For some younger employees, the newsletter seems to be less important as many people mentioned in the newsletter are not germane to their jobs.

Whether or not the sense of "family" can be continued over space and time is still in question as the firm grows geographically and in complexity. During the interviews, it was obvious that the older employees (30 years with the firm and up) know the genesis story and feel most strongly about the family metaphor. This is not surprising given that they have spent a good deal of their lives with the firm and many had met the founder and know all of the sons. The ten - to thirty-year employees, knew the basic facts of the story, but little else and many of their comments were direct quotes from the "then and now" campaign mentioned earlier, i.e. they would describe the genesis of the firm universally as "two men and a truck," but could not say when and where this occurred or what the men actually did. Newer

employees did not know the story at all, except for one who had had some hand in the design of the "now and then" campaign. The genesis story seems to be in decline as life long employees retire.

Although the genesis story may be fading, the "family" metaphor, which originated from their narrative, still has deep meaning for employees and management alike and has stayed intact as many of the comments above would indicate. Older employees used the metaphor to describe firm on their own in the course of their interviews. The family metaphor is deeply embedded in employees with the ten-years of service and up. The newer employees, however, took a lot longer to mention the metaphor in their storytelling, if at all. However, even they agreed with the metaphor if mentioned during the interview. Obviously, the nature of the business has changed and the corporate structure of the firm is evolving past the point where the genesis story can be sustained with the same robustness. It appears that newer employees stay with the firm because of the closeness of the relationships they develop with other departmental/service center colleagues, but do not attribute this directly to the "family-ness" of the firm itself or its genesis story. However, the clan like core sense of closeness, protectiveness and inclusiveness felt by nearly all employees is a powerful part of how this firm comprehends itself, how it should react to the outside threats, and how it should managed its internal relations. It is evolving, but not disappearing. Perhaps, this is merely the result of American society's changing perception of the importance of the family unit rather than a declining relevancy of this firm's own genesis story. Can it last? It is difficult to say.

CONCLUSION

In the example cited above, the genesis story of this "family" business and the stories of how the founder treated his employees have become completely integrated into the company's ethics in terms of a shared definition of a "good life" and the everyday morality of the firm. It is evolving as the industry and corporate structure require, but the implicit meaning of the metaphor has seemingly not drastically changed. As Schein notes, "Culture is perpetually changing . . . . But this ongoing evolutionary process does not change those things that are so thoroughly learned that they come to be a stable element of the group's life."(Schein, 1984) The family metaphor is definitely the "stable element" of this firm's self-perception.

This paper suggests that many firms will develop a genesis story about their origins and from that story a predominant metaphor for the culture of the firm eventually emerges. The story and metaphor will, in turn, determine how the firm will react to externally forced changes and internal relations. In doing so, the same story and metaphor will establish the ethics of the organization in terms of its perpetuation of a defining of the "good life"- the "Why?" of organizational life - as well as the morality with which individuals respond to each other and outside company stakeholders in everyday interactions. The morality of the firm will be, in turn, perpetuated by the stories that circulate among employees – both the good stories and the "ugly" ones. The telling and retelling of the genesis stories and morality "tales" are repeated so often and over such an extended period of time that they become thoroughly embedded in organizational and personal memory.

Some would consider storytelling from narrower perspectives as merely an "artifact" for communicating implicit organizational values (Schein, 1984; Randall and Martin, 2003); part of a cultural paradigm to "legitimise [*sic*] types of behavior" or relate events or actions of individuals that exhibit that behavior (Johnson and Scholes, 1999); are used to control the behavior of others in an organization (Wilkins, 1983;); play a significant role in organizational change and are basic to the process of organizational socialization (Brown, 1985) and change (Denning, 2001); or are an integral to the storage and retrieval of organizational memory (Walsh and Ungson, 1991). An organization might be even viewed as a "collective storytelling system in which the performance of stories is a key part of members' sense making" (Boje, 1991). But perhaps most importantly, "the power of stories and narrative derives from the story's ability to create a framework that our mind can understand" (Brown, 2005). It is the author's contention that the genesis story and its metaphor so deeply embedded that they frame the ethics of individuals and the morality of their interactions in the organization. Storytelling is central to organizational self-perception.

The question, of course, is can a firm's genesis story be created disingenuously, sustained or even "re-energized" to reinforce the metaphor and corporate coherence? Can internal marketing communications "recreate" the firm for control or manipulative purposes?   Perhaps, but forcing organizational change by creating a genesis story and metaphor that are not in tune with the embedded culture of an existing firm or are artificially

messaging the facts to develop a story about a start up to force uniform, compliant behavior where none exists can only lead to employee confusion and resentment. "Corporate fantasies" (Gabriel, 2000) or official stories are not the same stories told around the lunch table, during after hours socializing or at those times when employees discuss personal anxieties or question themselves and the actions of their firm. Genesis stories are just that – stories. The more they are told and retold by members of an organization – and not just its management public relations department – the more embedded the ethics and the morality of the firm become.

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